



# The Corps Engages: Vietnam War, underground tunnels

**T**O counter the immense technological advantage held by U.S. and allied forces during the Vietnam War, the Viet Cong developed an extensive network of underground tunnels. From these tunnels the enemy could effectively ambush American forces and then vanish. The tunnels became so highly developed that they eventually contained armories, hospitals, mess halls, manufacturing centers and storage facilities. Some of the tunnels were as much as 40 miles long — the Cu Chi tunnel complex alone contained 130 miles of passageways.

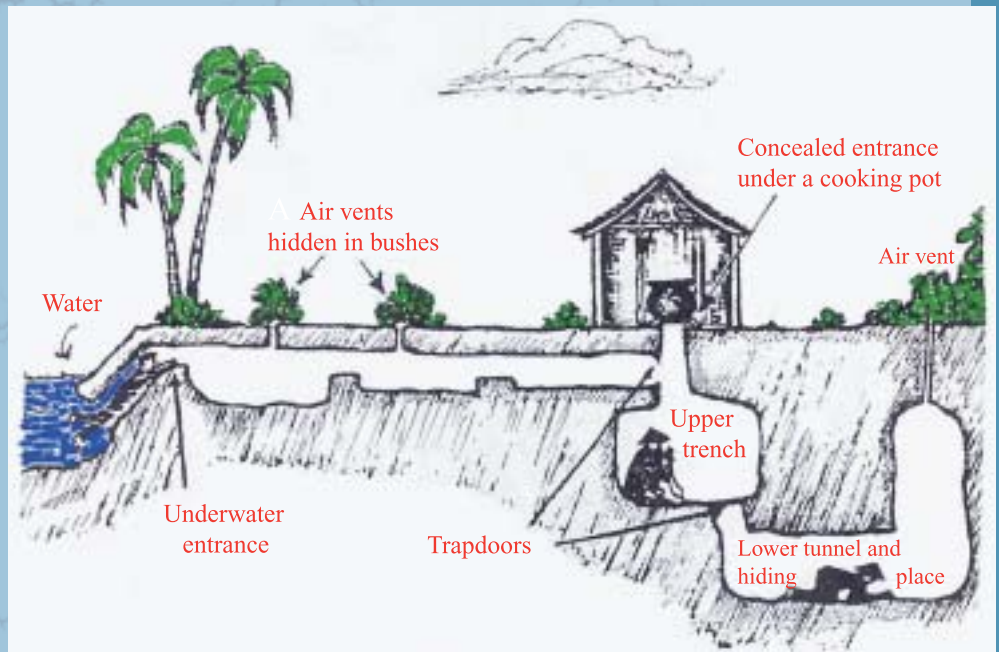
Extensive booby-trapping made it nearly impossible for American troops to extricate enemy fighters from the larger tunnels, which could withstand intense aerial bombardment by B-52 bombers.

While Army engineers faced a daunting task in destroying these systems, they nevertheless developed a number of methods for doing so.

The use of bulldozers and plows only displaced shallow tunnels. Flooding also proved ineffective, because the Viet Cong had wells deep inside the tunnels to prevent them from becoming saturated. Using explosives endangered American soldiers, and acetylene was too volatile. The least desirable method of flushing out the enemy was through the use of “tunnel rats,” volunteers who would enter tunnels and clear them with pistols and demolition charges.

One of the most effective ways the engineers hampered the enemy’s use of the tunnels was by using CS powder, smoke or riot-control agents aerosolized and dispersed by a “Mitey Mite” blower. It was believed that some of the chemical agents would remain on the walls and render them uninhabitable for months.

In the end, enemy forces’ operations from the tunnels were never completely shut down.



Many of the more sophisticated tunnels had several possible entrances and exits.



Engineers in Vietnam test a Mitey-Mite blower used to pump smoke or riot-control agents into enemy tunnels.